

ORIGIN/ACTION

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AIRGRAM

INT 2 NIS

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AGR	COM	FRB
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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

Document No. Review of this document by CIA has determined that

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Authority: HR 70-2

☐ It contains nothing of CIA interest
Date 25 Nov 1980 Reviewer 059785
DATE: February 4, 1963

FROM : AmEmbassy TAIPEI

SUBJECT: Evaluation of NIS Program

REF : Department Airgram CA-6275, December 7, 1962

The Department's review of the NIS program is timely from the Embassy's viewpoint in focussing attention on the specific types of reference material which can be useful to the Embassy. Since the Embassy NIS collection at present includes only sections on China, and since for most operational purposes the need is for immediately available current information on extremely specific matters, the rather general and basic coverage provided in NIS sections is seldom used. Our younger officers report that they have found the sections pertaining to their areas of reporting responsibility useful for their initial background reading. The NIS sections on Communist China are used somewhat more often by other officers, reflecting the obvious fact that reference reports are most helpful when it is not possible to go to local sources for direct information and when the sort of information needed does not originate in the office concerned. Thus, the Embassy supports the general statement made in paragraph four in the Department's referenced airgram that the NIS might be more useful for basic information on neighboring countries rather than on the country to which accredited.

The Embassy has, of course, got along without NIS materials on the USSR, Japan, the Philippines, Viet-Nam, Laos and Korea. Even for neighboring or related areas,

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To Department

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the Embassy need is usually for current intelligence rather than the basic NIS data. For example, during recent weeks there has been urgent need here for data on the disputed Sino-Indian border areas, but usable maps, etc. for this area appeared in the CIA Current Intelligence Digest, not in the NIS.

It is obviously impossible and unnecessary to maintain a full set of NIS reports on neighboring countries at every post. However, it might be feasible to keep here a small selection of the more commonly needed sections such as Key Personalities (Section 59); Structure of Government (Section 52); National Politics and Policies (Section 53); and General Economy (Section 60) for each of the countries named above. Embassy records and a check with reporting officers indicate that some officers have used the Political and Economic sections for background reference, and that the most frequently used section was the one on Key Personalities of Communist China. We believe that corresponding sections for the USSR would also be used occasionally if we had them here. In answer to the specific questions listed in the Department Airgram, a canvass of Embassy officers has elicited the following replies:

a) How NIS is Useful. NIS has primarily been useful as a means of stimulating comprehensive reporting on random portions of the NIS outline when those particular NIS sections are in preparation. The clearance of draft NIS sections through the Embassy has repeatedly brought out weak spots in the information already reported to Washington and misunderstandings regarding some of that material. The Embassy believes that it is a valuable exercise to review the outline periodically, although the NIS program may be an unduly expensive means of stimulating such a review.

b) Potential Value in Case of a Critical Situation. As suggested by this question, selected NIS sections such as those named above on certain neighboring countries might be used in a crisis. However, as in the case of the India-China border crisis last fall, the greatest need will probably be for current specific intelligence on the crisis itself. More rapid distribution of some current intelligence circular such as the Current Intelligence Digest would be much more apt to fill our need at such a time.

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c) Need for Detail. For Embassy operational uses, the need is frequently for great detail on very specific current subjects. However, for reference information concerning other countries, we believe it might be helpful to have the coverage now provided in a few selected sections of the NIS. Again, the sort of detail most commonly needed is biographic information.

d) Value of Sociological, Political and Economic Sections. NIS reports are necessarily outdated as far as most of our needs are concerned. However, some officers testify to their usefulness for background reading. These sections for the countries named above might be useful if we had them on hand.

e) Value of Chapter One on Nationalist China. This is of little use here for the reasons stated above. This sort of coverage might be sufficient on neighboring countries with which we have relatively little contact such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaya, New Zealand and Australia.

f) Value of Interdepartmental NIS Program. Assuming that a Departmental program would provide substantially the same information on a more current and timely basis, the Embassy would probably find its reports of greater value. However, the danger of wasteful duplication by other Departments seems obvious. We would place a higher priority on specific current intelligence on critical situations as they arise.

The foregoing replies have been circulated to Embassy reporting officers in the Economic and Political Sections, and to the Embassy Military Attaches, and reflect all views expressed by them.

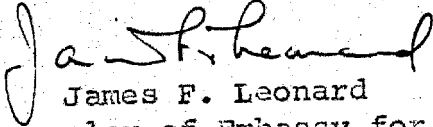
General Observations. Views of Embassy officers elicited by this inquiry were found to vary, as they probably do in Washington, from the opinion that the NIS is a useless and expensive boondoggle producing background material which is not as good as available private publications, to the view that the NIS, when available, provides a carefully evaluated summary of the background situation as of a certain designated time, to which it is possible to add later information which is more likely to be available at the Embassy. Private publications, while outstanding in some fields, are often less up to date, focussing on "history" rather than on

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current events, and do not systematically cover all the NIS outline. It is generally agreed that biographic data remains useful longer than many other types of data covered. Perhaps the most commonly criticized section has been the Characteristics of the People (Section 42) which, in certain respects, was felt to be a generation or so out of date. Specifically, pictures of Taiwanese (Hakka and Min-nan) physical types (p. 42-5) show them wearing old Chinese costumes whereas today even in the rice fields, Taiwanese girls more commonly wear Western dress.

For the Charge d'Affaires ad interim:


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